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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DISTRICT
OF COLUMBIA.

ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY THE

HON. HENRY B. F. MACFARLAND,

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,

AT THE EXECUTIVE MANSION,

DURING THE EXERCISES COMMEMORATIVE OF THE ONE HUN-
DREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF THE SEAT OF GOVERNMENT IN THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER THE TWELFTH,
NINETEEN HUNDRED.

COMPLIMENTS

OF THE

WASHINGTON BOARD OF TRADE.

1900.





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At the Executive Mansion, on the morning of Wednesday, December 12, 1900, following a reception by the President of the United States to the Governors of the States and Territories, the Commissioners of the District of Columbia and others, exercises commemorative of the one hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the seat of government in the District of Columbia were held in the East Room. Senator Eugene Hale, of Maine, Chairman of the Joint Committee on the celebration of the Centennial, introduced Mr. John Joy Edson, Chairman of the Committee on Exercises at the Executive Mansion, as Presiding Officer. There were present the President of the United States, the members of his Cabinet, the Chief Justice of the United States, and the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States, the President *pro tempore* of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Commanding General of the Army, the Admiral of the Navy, the Senate Committees on the Centennial Celebration and the District of Columbia, the House Committees on the Centennial Celebration and the District of Columbia, the Governors of the States and Territories, the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, the members of the Committee at Large and of the Citizens' Committee on the Centennial Celebration, the members of the Court of Appeals and of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia, the members of the United States Court of Claims, and a number of the citizens of the District of Columbia. In the course of the exercises the address which follows was delivered by the Honorable Henry B. F. Macfarland, President of the Board of Commissioners of the District of Columbia.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

One hundred years ago the District of Columbia became the permanent seat of the Government of the United States. For the first time the young nation had a capital after twenty-four years of wandering from one State to another. Moved by the attack of the mob of soldiers on Congress in Philadelphia in 1783, the makers of the new Government had written in the Federal Constitution that the nation should have its own capital, in a Federal district to be ceded to the exclusive control of Congress. It is the only provision for an independent capital ever made by any nation. The North and South had contended for the honor of providing this Federal district until threats of secession were occasionally heard, and it seemed to some that there might soon come to be no need for a National Capital. States offered cities, and even capitals, and their representatives in Congress fought over these offers. At last, with a characteristic compromise, the fathers provided that the Federal district should be given to the South, while the North should be given its desire in the assumption by the nation of the Revolutionary indebtedness of the States. Nothing could have been more fortunate than this decision, unless it be the determination to leave to George Washington the selection of the site for the new capital, and the direction of its preparation. His own State of Virginia had offered ten miles square. The State of Maryland had done the same, and under the authority of Congress Washington had one hundred miles of the Potomac, from Williamsport in Maryland to the Eastern Branch, where to choose. Washington chose with the eye of a surveyor the best site available under the

circumstances, and then laid it out with the eye of a seer. All that he saw could not come true. The Federal District could not contain "the greatest commercial emporium" of the United States which he hoped for here, believing that the Chesapeake and Ohio canal, which he had promoted, would, as its name suggested, with the Potomac, connect the then East and West by the most practicable route to the sea. Nor could it contain the national university, which was so dear to Washington's heart that he richly remembered it in his will, though it was to become a roofless university. But Washington saw clearly, what few other public men could see, that the young and small, but not feeble nation, would grow and expand until it became the greatest of all nations. While men were still doubting whether it would last long as a nation George Washington was planning, with the assistance of Thomas Jefferson and L'Enfant and Ellicott, a National Capital for all time—a city of magnificent proportions, greater and better in design than any other in the world. No other city has ever been laid out on such a scale or in such a style. Even Washington's reputation for common sense did not save it from being called a visionary scheme. For more than half a century home and foreign wits jested at it as it lay undeveloped, half village, half capital, through the neglect of the General Government. (Although it was south of Mason and Dixon's line, it was almost in the centre of the narrow Union of 1800, as it stretched along the Atlantic coast, but after the expansion of its domains, begun under Washington, three years later, under Jefferson, crossed the Mississippi, suggestions of the removal of the capital west of the Alleghenies began, and continued, in what seemed an entirely natural way to the statesmen meeting in the then Washington, until the railroad and the telegraph making communication so much quicker, deprived the advocates of removal of their chief argument.

The Federal City, as Washington called it, the City of

Washington, as the Commissioners and Congress inevitably called it, is Washington's prediction that the nation would live for centuries, and would grow to the full need of such a capital. It is most appropriate that we begin this celebration almost under the shadow of the Washington Monument, that unique structure which practically marks the centre of the original District of Columbia, and in the President's House which so interested Washington, and is the only public building completed in 1800 that is still standing. (For, while Congress, in the preliminary legislation provided only for a Federal district (though it afterwards ratified the preparations for a Federal city made by Washington), the city, named for him, has always been more prominent than the District in the world's eye, and now that they are so nearly coterminous, the capital will be more and more known by its great founder's name; not, however, as Washington City, but as the City of Washington.)

It is interesting to read, in the official and unofficial documents, of the part which Washington took, with his customary energy, thoroughness and patience in all the details of the founding of the Federal district and of the Federal city. (It was he, personally, who made the bargain with the nineteen original proprietors, advantageous to them but much more so to the Government, and who finally brought even the refractory David Burns to terms. It was he, personally, who directed the commissioners and the surveyors, as they laid out the streets and built buildings, and who mediated between them when they quarrelled.) It was the crowning work of his life, and perhaps nothing that he did, except the Jersey campaign that saved the Revolution, and the making of the Constitution that saved the nation, interested or pleased him more. It must have grieved him that he could not live to see the actual establishment of the National Government in the city that had been named for him. He died in December, and, (under the act of Congress passed ten

years before, the National Government began its removal from Philadelphia in May. By July the six executive departments of that day were all in full working order here. By November, President Adams, after a visit of inspection in June, was occupying this house, and Congress was in session preparatory to the regular session in December. The Supreme Court having adjourned in August until February, did not meet here in 1800. But through the address of President Adams in Congress, and the responses of the Senate and the House, it was officially declared in November that the seat of Government had been established here. These formal announcements and the addresses exchanged by President Adams and the citizens are full of gratitude for the fact that the National Government had at last a home of its own. Privately, there was much complaining over the discomforts of the new city. The letters of Mrs. Adams show what was thought of the President's house by his family. There were similar criticisms of the unfinished Capitol, while Senators and Representatives complained of the places where they had to board, and all agreed in denouncing the wretched roads which were called streets. Besides the construction of the few public buildings at a cost of a million dollars, given by Maryland and Virginia or raised by the sale of lots, and the outlining of the few streets, little had been done by the Government in the ten years of preparation, and less proportionately had been done by private individuals. The Government had no money to spare for such work from its scanty treasure, and there were only a few thousand people here. There had been a good deal of speculation in the new-made real estate lots, but there had been comparatively little building on them. It is not strange that the members of the Government, and of the Diplomatic Corps, looked back regretfully from the crude capital to the comforts and pleasures of Philadelphia. If Congress had then begun to provide for the gradual improvement of the streets and parks reserved by

Washington as the property of the nation, which owned more than half of the new city, it would have carried out the plan of its founder as he doubtless intended should be done. (But Congress left almost all that work to the few thousand inhabitants, who were also expected to provide most of the cost of police and fire protection, and other municipal services, while Congress practically confined its appropriations to the construction, repair and maintenance of the Government buildings and their surroundings.) It was impossible for the people of Washington to sustain this burden, which was not shared by their neighbors of Georgetown and Alexandria, and as the size of the Government, and with it the population and needs of the city increased, its municipal affairs went from bad to worse. Guided by their admirable mayors (at first appointed by the President, but afterwards elected, first by councils and later by the people assisted by councils), the Washingtonians doubtless did their best to perform what was impossible, but of course failed. Even when Congress recognized this failure and provided for some of its indebtedness, it (made no material change in the arrangement for nearly three-quarters of a century.) (Indeed, it provided no form of government for the entire District of Columbia until 1871, and no permanent form of government for it until 1878, although in 1801 it did establish a judicial system for it.) Washington and Georgetown, and Alexandria, (until grown tired of the unreciprocal arrangement she induced the nation in 1846 to let Virginia take back the territory south of the Potomac,) had each a separate municipal government, while a levy court of justices of the peace in Washington county, and a county court of justices of the peace in Alexandria county, looked after the regions outside of the towns. The United States, owning more than half of the real estate of the District of Columbia, was for nearly three-fourths of the century like a visitor rather than a citizen, paying no taxes, and making but small direct contributions to meet the expenses of the

City of Washington, or of the District of Columbia. It spent over ninety million dollars in the District in that time on public buildings and their surroundings, and occasional contributions to local objects, but it left the citizens to carry out the rest of Washington's plans and to maintain local government. (It was not until after the Civil War had made the National Capital known to the whole country and endeared to two-thirds of it as never before, it was not until it had been contended for by the bravest armies ever arrayed in battle, that the national interest in it induced Congress to assume the nation's share of its government and its burden. The National Government ceased to have a transient feeling, and the talk of the removal of the capital west of the Mississippi could, for the first time, be treated humorously. The hundreds of thousands of men whom the demands of war first brought to Washington came from all the States and Territories. Many of them went home again to tell the people how homely Washington was, yet how well worth fighting for; many remained as citizens, while others gave their lives that it might continue to be the capital of the United States. From these men sprang its new life.

— (The history of the District of Columbia falls naturally into two chapters. The first covers the seventy-one years in which it had no real existence. It was neither dead nor alive, although it had a name to live. For forty-six years the cities of Washington, Georgetown and Alexandria lived independently, but in more or less harmony within the limits of the District of Columbia. Then Alexandria withdrew, while Washington and Georgetown lived on the same terms for twenty-five years more, but with constantly increasing community of interest. Washington, as the actual seat of Government, naturally grew as the nation grew, and much more rapidly than its older neighbors. With a selected population, representing from the beginning the best elements of the whole country, brought together largely in connection with the National Government,

which at first boasted of long tenure of office, Washington developed a local life unique in character. It shared with Georgetown a peculiarly refined and cultivated society, and an especially intelligent citizenship. It had a cosmopolitan tone and view before the days of constant and general world-travelling. It had the consciousness of being distinguished by the presence of the National Government and by events in the country's history. Members of the Diplomatic Corps and European travellers who wrote about the National Capital in the first half of the century admitted all this, even when they made sharp criticisms of its physical appearance and temporary defects in comfort and convenience. It is easy to see, in the letters and reminiscences of the Washingtonians of that time, that life here had a flavor and interest not found in any other American city. Washingtonians thought nationally more than the people of other cities, and showed a peculiar public spirit as they endeavored to meet the obligations which the neglect of the National Government imposed upon them in peace and in war. To meet the local needs a considerable commercial and manufacturing interest developed with the growth of the city, and gradually the taxable wealth increased so that by 1860 it amounted to \$547 per capita.

The Civil War wrought great changes here. For the second time the whole District of Columbia was recognized in practical legislation by the creation of a metropolitan police force. The exigencies of the war times compelled in other ways the recognition of the fact that there was a District of Columbia. But Congress was too busy to take up any general scheme for its improvement until ten years later when, by the act of February 21, 1871, it created a territorial form of government with a Governor and a Legislature, the Governor and the upper Chamber to be appointed by the President, together with a Board of Public Works and a Board of Health, while the House of Delegates was to be elected by the male citizens.

With this act begins the second chapter of the District's

history and its real existence under a substantial government. In three years the District was transformed, largely through the energy and enterprise of one man in the new government. All that should have been done toward the improvement of the District, and especially the City of Washington, according to Washington's plan in seventy years, was done in half that many months. The District was saved from being, like the then unfinished Washington Monument, a disgrace rather than a credit to the great founder. It was literally redeemed and given beauty for ugliness, and wealth for poverty. But the first work was done roughly, hastily, though thoroughly, and it naturally roused strong opposition, and for the time being was misunderstood. People saw the comparatively large indebtedness it created, rather than the incomparably large results it ensured, and many of them felt personal resentment, as well as righteous anger, against some of the workers. Between the private griefs, and the public indignation, and a certain amount of political feeling, there was pressure enough on Congress to induce it to make a radical change of government in 1874, abolishing the elective franchise, and providing temporarily a government by three Commissioners, at the same time guaranteeing the interest and principal of the bonds issued for the new improvements, and providing for the preparation of a permanent frame of government, and a plan of dividing the payment of expenses between the United States and the District of Columbia. Four years later these pledges were redeemed in the act of June 11, 1878, which the United States Supreme Court has called the "Constitution of the District". It provided, in place of the Governor and Legislature, a board of three Commissioners, to be appointed by the President, and to execute the laws of Congress, with the equitable provision that Congress should appropriate for the expenses half from the District tax funds and half from the National Treasury. Although many good citizens have regretted that in the National Capital taxation without repre-

sentation is the principle of government, it is generally admitted that for the District of Columbia the present form of government is the best possible. (Under it the District has doubled in population and in wealth. Under it it has become the most beautiful capital in the world.) Free from the slightest suspicion of scandal, successive Boards of Commissioners of the highest character have administered the affairs of the District more efficiently and economically than the affairs of any other American municipality have been administered, and to such general satisfaction that there has been no lasting criticism. The compact between the National Government and the people of the District of Columbia for the equal division of its expenses has worked so well that no adverse comment is now made upon it.)

As the larger patriotism makes the nation dearer than the State, so the capital of the nation claims the allegiance of the citizen of every other city, even above that which he gives to his own city. This is recognized in the growing desire of our countrymen everywhere that the needs of the National Capital shall be generously met. They agree that no niggard hand should minister to the nation's city, and that regardless of outlay, save that it shall be wise, she shall be kept the most beautiful capital in the world.

(After twenty-two years of experience the present government is recognized as being, in the language of the act of 1878, the "permanent form of government" for the District, or in the language of the United States Supreme Court in 1890, "the final judgment of Congress as to the system of a government which should obtain.") Like all human systems, it has its imperfections in theory and in practice, but for its purpose it comes nearer to an ideal standard than any other of its kind. (Its greatest virtue is that it is distinctly a government by public opinion.) The unusually high intelligence of the citizens of the District, and their remarkable interest and activity in the conduct of its affairs, make them its real rulers, under the constitutional authority of the President and Congress.

The very character of the District of Columbia as the seat of the National Government makes a part of its life the history of that Government in the century now closing—the most remarkable since the first of our era. Every President, except George Washington, has performed the duties of his great office, the greatest in the world, within these walls. Every Congress since the fifth has done its work in the Capitol. There, too, the Supreme Court of the United States has rendered all its decisions since the day when John Marshall became its Chief Justice. Simply to mention the names of John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, and James Monroe, and John Quincy Adams, and Andrew Jackson, and then of Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant, brings before the mind a throng of great deeds done in this very house. Think of the expansion of the country by successive acts of the Presidents, beginning with Jefferson. Think of the negotiations with foreign powers, of the war-making and of the peace-making, of the formulation of far-reaching policies, and of all the dealings with Congress by President after President. Think what went on here under President Lincoln alone, when the eyes of the whole world were for the first time fixed upon the Capital of the United States. Time would fail to tell the mere story of the great Presidents who have made history in the District of Columbia.

When we go to the Capitol this afternoon we shall be reminded of the great Senators and Representatives and Judges who have won lasting fame by their services to the country here. Their memorable acts, speeches and opinions are events in our history as well as in the history of the country. These illustrious men who have made, executed and interpreted our national laws for a hundred years, belong to the District of Columbia as well as to the States that sent them here. They have been the dominant element in the life of the District of Columbia, and have given its society a peculiar character.

The District of Columbia, coming to the manhood of States, at the opening of the twentieth century, looks forward to a larger and nobler career as the Capital of the nation which has grown in its short life to be the greatest in the world. At the beginning of the nineteenth century it was the Capital of an ill-defined quarter of the present United States, with a population one-fifteenth that of the present, and despised by Europe. The flag waved nowhere on the Gulf of Mexico, or west of the Mississippi, and only in scattered settlements west of the Alleghenies. The locomotive, the telegraph, the telephone, and almost all the other great mechanical inventions were yet to come. The country and the Government were alike poor. There was no American literature, there was no American art, there was no American music, there was no American press.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the District of Columbia is the Capital of a mighty nation whose flag brightens and controls the far Pacific as well as the near Atlantic, that holds the headship of this hemisphere and leads among the powers of the world, all coveting its favor; enriched at home with the material blessings which its myriad inventors and industrial chieftains have bestowed upon all mankind, and proud of the literary, artistic and musical achievements of its sons and daughters. Made one out of many in the fires of civil war, and strengthened by their tempering, it is even more than the Father of his country believed that in a century it could become. Standing here in its splendid Capital, looking back with pride on its wonderful past, it can face the future with hope, in spite of difficulties and dangers, in a confidence born of reverent and trustful devotion still given to Him who has been our dwelling place in all generations, and to whom a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is passed.

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